[The Farlows]

Anna Win Stevens

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Mrs. Albert Farlow

15 Hall Street,

Asheville, N.C.

The Farlows

Should you walk along Hall street facing away from Factory Hill, you could pick the Farlow Cottage from the others because of its neat, ship-shape appearance. Though needing paint, the cottage and the tiny yard show care. The low picket-fence lacks no pickets; the gate hangs true. Inside the fence the low hedge has been neatly clipped. On each edge, the paved walk has been carefully sodded.

In the summer there were garden flowers.

On a Monday morning, a part of the family wash might be hung on a cord stretched evenly from post to post on the front porch, as well as on the clothesline in the narrow strip of side yard, but the garments would be noticeably well washed. So would be the rag rug spread to dry on a clean newspaper where the morning sun strikes the porch floor.

The same order and cleanliness would appear within. The big, brown heater beside which sit Mrs. Farlow and her widowed daughter, Mrs. Colbox, seems to have been polished recently. The blue counterpane on the well made bed in the corner, though faded, is spotless and unwrinkled. So, too, are the white muslin half curtains at the windows, and

the hand-embroidered linen cover on the dresser. The bright red, oil cloth square on the floor is as good as new, and as shining. The furniture, though cheap, is in good trim and well polished. A few framed prints on the wall, a motto or so-the effect is distinctly cozy. The faded cotton dresses of the two women are perfectly clean. C9 - N.C. Box 1.

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To win Mrs. Farlow's good will it is only necessary to mention Mrs. Elizabeth Morris, now head of the Adult Education Project. Her face will glow as she says: “I well remember the first time I saw Mrs. Morris. I was workin' in the garden, and had my apron full of plants and roots. “Good Morning, Mrs. Farlow; said Mrs. Morris smilin' and holdin' out her hand to shake hands with me. ““I stood up, holdin' the plants in my apron. I'm not fitten to shake hands with you; I said; I've been diggin in the dirt.”

“Mrs. Morris said real hearty-like; I've come to give you a special invitation to the night school. You must be sure to accept'. “Well, I didn't want to go to night school. I'd been onct. And some boys and girls what was there laughed at my clothes and remarked on them and laughed at me, because I couldn't read or write, so when Mrs. Morris invited me, I thought; here's a young sprig of a girl wants me to come to night school, so she'll have somebody to laugh at, and something funny to tell her City friends about us pore mill people.'

“So I said; 'I don't think I can come! But Mrs. Morris kep' on insistin' until I said; I'll think about it!

“That night I set out for the [might?] school right after supper. Albert, my husband, has a real good education.” Albert dropped out of school at fourteen. He was always 3 amused at me because I couldn't read, or write, or figger. When he saw I was goin' to that school, he teased me about a woman of my age.” Mrs. Farlow was then in the forties- 'settin' out evenings' and he laughed at the thought of me learnin' to read. But I thought I'd give the school a trial.

“When I went in, Mrs. Morris come up and called me by name, shook hands with me, and said as how glad she was to see me.

“She gave me a chair by a table' a sheet of paper and a pencil, and set me something to write.

“She saw that I was awkward and didn't know how to begin; so she put her arm around my shoulders and tuk my hand to show me. When she put her arm around me, the tears come into my eyes, and kept comin', because I had been so mean as to misjudge her in my heart, and to think that she would make fun of me, and her so good and sweet.”

“The next evenin', though I could'nt go back, because Flora here,” pointing to Mrs. Colbox, “took sick with typhoid. But every night Mrs. Morris sent me my lesson, and when I wrote it and sent it back, she corrected and returned it. I made so many mistakes I got real discouraged, and would have give up; but Flora said, 'Don't worry, Ma. When I get well from typhoid, I'll help you with [yor?] lessons.' Flora had finished the fourth grade!

“So between Mrs. Morris and Flora, I learned to read and write and spell and to figger a little.

“Albert still thought it was a joke; but it meant everything to me. Why, before I went to night school, I coundn't 4 even read the numbers on the houses. When I wanted to find a certain house, I'd ask some one where it was. They'd tell me the number. I'd go on along the street as if I understood, but I was that embarrassed. When I learned to read the house numbers, it made me real happy.”

“Pa made fun of Ma, learnin' to read, because/ when she begun to read the newspapers, she kept up with what was goin' on better'n he did. That's what griped him,” interposed Mrs. Colbox.

“I love to read newspapers yet,” continued Mrs. Farlow,” “ When I can afford to buy them. When Albert is sick at night, he has suffocatin' spells with his heart; and I'm afeard to go to bed 'til he's better, I sits and reads the paper 'til eleven or twelve o'clock. If I couldn't read, I'd just have to sit.”

“Sometimes I sits and reads a story-magazine'.

But Mrs. Farlow's tone of voice implied that she thinks “story magazines” silly and perhaps a little wicked.

The night school taught Mrs. Farlow other things. “there was community singing, and sometimes we'd get to act in a play, and even to take it on the road.

“And there was cooking classes from house to house in the morning'. Those who could cook nice, could take their biscuits or cookies to give to people they wanted to interest in the school. Maybe later the people would give us materials or even checks to help furnish the club-house we was working for.

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“The reason I never learned to read when I was small,” explained Mrs. Farlow,” was because I lived too far from the school house. My pa was a cripple, Confederate soldier,” Mrs. Farlow is now sixty-six-” and he lived on a farm at Milledgeville, up around Salisbury. The school house was a long way off acrost the Yadkin River. There was no bridge over the Yadkin, only a high foot-log. Pa was scared to let us children cross the log, for fear we'd fall in the river.

“Besides, he needed us nine children to work for him. He put each of us to work on the farm, as soon as we was six years old. I hoed corn and picked cotton from the time I was six years old to nine years. After I grew up, I even split rails.

“Yes, we always had plenty to eat: Milk and butter, beans and potatoes, and other vegetables. We never had to wait for Associated Charities to feed us.

“When I was nine years old, I went to work in the mill at Milledgeville, N. C. I worked in the spinnin' room every day in the week, twelve hours a day. I was paid ten cents a day.

“Yes, the pay is better now, but the work is harder. Workin' in the mill now is just slavery.”

“After Ma come to Asheville” chimed in Mrs. Colbox, she kept on working' in the [Cottonills?] Cotton mills . She met Pa here and married him when she was seventeen.”

“Albert was from the Country, too,” continued Mrs. Farlow.” He went to school until he was fourteen. His parents was 6 renters and not stout. When he was fourteen, they died. They had been sick so long they didn't leave him nothing. He kept on working' on a farm for a while. But he wasn't paid much. So he quit and come to work in the cotton mills in Asheville.”

When asked if many of the mill operatives come from the country, Mrs. Farlow answered.

“Yes, they think workin' on the farm is too hard. They want ready cash. So they move their families, children and all, into the mill village. The children ain't allowed to work in the mill until they're eighteen years old. The law don't force them to go to school after they're fourteen. So when they reaches fourteen, most of them drop out of school, and wander up and down the streets or thinks of nothing but dressing up, and wasting their time in the moving picture houses. If the children was taught to work when they are young, and was made to work hard, there wouldn't be so many people have to depend on the Government, now.”

Mrs. Farlow's husband, a loom-fixer, has worked in the mill since he was a boy. He now suffers from heart trouble and at times can work only two days out of the week. A part of the time he can work four days a week. He gets four dollars, forty cents a day. Mrs.

Farlow, herself, worked in the mill for a long time after her marriage, dropping out only long enough for her children to be born. Of her nine children, seven lived to be grown, and married. Four of these completed high school. The others dropped out of school against the 7 wishes of their parents. “And I raised three grand children besides,” she boasts; “And we never has had to ask any body for anything.”

“No. we aint been able to save much; it took all we made just to live and keep up the family.

“Ma took in boarders for a while;” contributed Mrs. Colbox,” and with what she and Pa was able to save they bought this five-room house. That was eighteen years ago. We've lived in it ever since.”

“What money we did save,” sighed Mrs. Farlow,” was in the Central Bank when it failed. Me and Albert had three hundred dollars thar, and my daughter Flora here,” indicating Mrs. Colbox,” had all the money left from her husband's life insurance. It was six hundred and thirty-six dollars.”

Mrs. Colbox's only son, a boy of seventeen, was killed in an accident “come six years ago.”

“He went to work at fourteen,” said Mrs. Colbox. He worked at the Western Union awhile, at the Langren news-stand, and at the Postal Telegraph. The people who ran the Langren News-stand thought so much of him they wanted to adopt him and educate him. At the Postal Telegraph he worked twelve hours a day, from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. He made from ten to twelve dollars a week including tips.

“He had just begun workin' in the mill,” continued Mrs. Colbox,” when he was killed. No body knows how it happened. He was riding on his bicycle on Buxton Street. He must have been struck down by a car. There wasn't any witnesses. Somebody found him unconscious in the street.

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He died four hours later, without ever coming to”.

Mrs. Colbox can get no job. “The mill won't take me on because my eyesight is defective. The W.P.A. won't put me on in the sewing-room, as long as Pa has a job in the mills. I'm plumb wore out trying to get a W.P.A. job.”

Mr. Farlow, who will be seventy-one “Come next June,” works from two ays days a week to four, as his physical condition permits.

“Dr[,?] Morgan says as how Pa isn't able to work. He has a leaking heart and may drop dead any day. Pa don't know how bad off he is. But if we was to tell him, it would only bring on a bad spell, and he'd give right up.”

“Sometimes he can't sleep nights, except sitting up in a chair,” said his wife. “He has suffocating spells. When he works in the mill, his ankles swell, till they hangs over his shoe tops from standing' up so much. “Out of the money he makes, he has to pay three dollars every six days for strychnine and digitalis, and some weeks he don't work but two days.”

“Seems like we [?] can't get along this way much longer, what with taxes, coal, light and water, life insurance comin' due, medicines, and doctor's bills,” moaned Mrs. Colbox.

“We've managed to keep up this far,” chorused, “Mrs. Farlow,” but we owe a sight of doctor's bills, and we are fallin' behind on taxes. The house needs painting, too.”

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Mrs. Colbox, thin and restless, is subject to rheumatism and has “had three nervous break downs.” Her skin looks yellow and drawn. The doctor's bills are mostly hers.

Quite a family disturbance was occasioned recently by Elizabeth, one of the grand-daughters whom Mrs. Farlow “had raised.” She was s senior at Lee Edwards High School. One October afternoon she walked out of the house and sent a [?] neighbor's child back with a note. The note said, “I was married in Greenville last May. I will come for my clothes tomorrow.”

“I wouldn't 'a felt so badly about it,” sighed Mrs. Farlow,” if she had told me sooner, before I bought all her school books.”

“I guess she was skeered to “explained Mrs. Colbox. “Her grandpa wouldn't let her go out evenin's, not have any [conpany?].

Glenn Dayton, that was her boy friend, used to meet [her?] her after school and bring her to the village in his car. He couldn't come to the house, because Pa said if he found him hangin' around he'd jail him.

“I guess it will come out all right though. Glenn's a good steady boy, and he has a good job in the tannery. He's pore, but Elizabeth has nothin; [?] neither . Pore folks can't expect to marry with the rich. They jest gets their equals.”

The family are good Methodists, and belong to the Haywood Methodist Church, to which they are regular contributors. “I think the reason Pa gets along as well as he does, “observed Mrs. [?] Colbox ,” is because he goes to church regular, pays his 10 church dues, and lives right.”

Mrs. Colbox admits having at onetime belonged to the Salvation Army, but she doesn't find the Army as generous or as profitable as it used to be.

To eke out their slender income both women make quilts. When they furnish all the materials and do all the work, which includes the quilting, they collect three dollars a quilt. But a detailed enumeration proves that the material alone costs two dollars and a half. “But

sometimes we make more. My niece who was married last month wanted us to quilt her the design called the “Wedding Ring;' so she furnished us all the material and ordered two quilts at $1.50 a piece. We generally makes two quilts a week. It takes a day and a half to quilt each one,” concluded Mrs. Colbox. She displayed two quilts they were making. They were, indeed, quite colorful and gay.

“I used my quilt money to buy shoes and cotton cloth for two dresses summoned up Mrs. Colbox.

Said Mrs. Farlow, “I haven't had a new dress in ten years.”